



House Committee: Families, Children & Seniors

March 13, 2013

Opposition to House Bill 4118

HB 4118 sets up a system of suspicion based drug testing of welfare recipients based on a mandatory screening tool to determine if there is reasonable suspicion to require the applicant take a drug test, the cost of which is born by the applicant to be reimbursed if the results are negative. We appreciate that the state has learned from past mistakes and the new proposal bars drug testing unless there is individualized suspicion of drug use. However, we are concerned that new mistakes are being made.

Despite its perceived popularity, mandatory drug testing of welfare applicants is unfair and relies on some of the ugliest stereotypes of our poor. The fact is poor people are not more likely to use drugs than the general public. Studies show that welfare applicants do not use or abuse drugs at a greater rate than the general population. An analysis by the United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration reports, "[o]f the 17.2 million illicit drug users aged 18 or older in 2005, 12.9 million (74.8 percent) were employed."

We should not spend millions of dollars on drug testing when we know that there are precious few dollars available to help people who are struggling, to help children who are struggling and to help families who are having a hard time making ends meet.

Drug testing based on status is not only humiliating; it is a waste of resources that typecasts economically disadvantaged residents as drug users and drug pushers. It's undeniable – the only reason applicants are subjected to these humiliating and intrusive tests is that they are poor. Other recipients of tax payer dollars are not subject to mandatory testing.

- General Motor executives were not drug tested before taking advantage of a taxpayer-backed bailout.
- Drug testing was not a requirement of the mortgage-interest deduction, which cost the government \$100 billion.
- Students seeking government aid to attend our colleges and universities are not drug tested as a condition of receiving grants and scholarships.

We understand our state's good intentions in trying to help residents who use drugs. However, being poor is not a crime in Michigan and welfare applicants should not be treated as criminals. Mandatory drug testing is both an ineffective and fiscally irresponsible means to discover drug abuse. If Michigan must adopt a drug testing program for welfare applicants, the program should, at the very least, focus on recovery rather than punishment. Instead of a stigmatizing policy, our state should invest in the training of our government employees to appropriately identify those with addictions and help them through expanded treatment plans. Not only has this worked in other states, but addiction experts agree that this is the best tactic to help those dealing with addiction.

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